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ABSTRACT

The paper suggests informal and formal procedures for evaluating students whose primary language is not English. The importance of detailing the student's educational history and of understanding the community setting is noted. The native language should be used to gather this and other informal data, and translators should be trained in cultural nuances and sensitized to cultural taboos. In formal assessment, informed consent should first be obtained, and issues such as deciding when to use the native language and whether to use test norms should be analyzed. Cautions are listed against over-identifying children from limited English speaking groups as handicapped, and recommendations are made of safeguards, such as keeping statistical records on ethnic and linguistic groups in special education placements. An appendix lists questions for informal assessment; these address such topics as language, culture, environment, and previous interventions. (CL)

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Guide to Assessing Children for Whom
English is a Second Language

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INFORMAL ASSESSMENT

The most frequent assessment trouble spot noted in the assessment of children for whom English is a second language is the lack of awareness that oral language development is different from the ability to perform classroom academic work at the same level as the oral proficiency that is noted in these children. Staffing teams are often not alerted that there is a primary language other than English for the child being evaluated. Since the child is fairly proficient in English oral skills, the evaluator assumes a basic mastery by the child and utilizes standard referenced norms in assessing these children, Cummins (1985).

The development of oral skills by children generally takes about 18 to 24 months, according to Snow and Holtnagel-Hohle (1978). In the Boulder Valley Schools, we have witnessed children taking up to a year to leave the silent period where the child displays little or no communication in English.

During the child's initial two years of school, little academic development will be noticed. Retention for these children is not recommended. If the oral language development is delayed beyond 24 months, formal assessment may be warranted. However, there are other informal practices to aid us in evaluating these children's needs.

Has the child been exposed to a normal educational history? While a child may have been in school for two years, careful review of the student's file may indicate that the child was pulled out of school for a significant amount of time and would not have realized reasonable benefit from the regular classroom. Children from extreme rural areas may have been exposed to monthly traveling teachers in foreign countries. It is typical for parents to list a large city nearest their hamlet when asked where their children received their schooling; but upon carefully requesting additional information, one can often discover that the parent shared the nearest large city which may have been hundreds of miles away from where the child actually received their schooling. This is important to note when comparing children from the same country. They may not have had the same educational opportunity due to financial status of the family or lack of facilities in the immediate community. Different parents will also have different occupational, possibly tribal, and educational status in their communities.

In informal assessment, we need to evaluate the community setting. Some children will have the advantage of parents who speak English or neighborhood children who speak English.

Their oral language development will be advanced and unfortunately for those who do not have these advantages, they will most likely be compared with each other.

To gather this information and other informal data (suggested data gathering is attached, Alvarado, 1986), the native language must be used. If a district is fortunate to have multi-lingual trained educators, there are fewer potential problems. If not, translators need to be trained. Translators may have cultural biases against subgroups in their culture or limited English proficiency. They will most likely lack understanding of special education or handicapped children. Age appropriate adults need to be utilized out of respect for cultures that do not accept children or young adults as translators. Many cultures will not accept women taking significant roles over males. Different subgroups have particular nuances and most have familial nuances.

This information is not exhaustive of the problems in assessing normal educational development. There are similar problems in assessing a child's developmental history. If a child was over-indulged by a family, the child may not have had the need to develop language at the rate of the other siblings. Foreign parents may change the age of children to benefit the family. Many cultures use a different system for assigning births than do Americans.

Frequently, a family will be asked if the child had any fevers during childhood. Of course, all children have. We need to be careful in establishing what we believe to be greater than normal limits, especially if a translator is being used who may answer without consulting the family. Some cultures do not recognize certain illnesses and yet recognize others that Americans do not. These may be spiritual in nature and deal with cultural taboos.

The following guide has been developed for used during informal assessment of academic growth. These are norms for language arts for children for whom English is a second language and not in a regular bilingual classroom that are being developed by the Boulder Valley Schools.

Achievement Gains By Months	Years in Regular Attendance	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Faster Rates Suggest Gifted
	Average Ability Student	0.3 to 0.4	1.3	2.5	3.6	4.4	5.9	
	Below Average Ability Student	0.2	0.9	1.5	2.0	2.5	3.0	
	Above Average Ability Student	0.7	1.8	3.0	4.1	5.5	6.9	

What is the profile of the typical referral of a child with English as a second language? The child is making slow academic progress. They do not participate or volunteer much in group activities. The child's math development is better than their language arts skills.

In the regular bilingual program with native language instruction, the peer group may be utilized to informally assess the academic growth of children with similar developmental backgrounds. It is a better educational practice to assess the individual rate of growth because class environments and student profiles will change from year to year, rather than to use the class norms.

It is important to note that Hispanic groups (except the Cubans) have historically demonstrated greater difficulty than other language groups in achieving academic success in American schools (Hirano-Nakanishi and Diaz, 1982). While speculation as to the reasons for this, the answer is often suggested as not being child centered.

FORMAL ASSESSMENT

When the agreement to seek parental permission to assess a child has been reached, care is necessary to obtain informed consent. It is not unusual practice to send any person proficient in the native language to obtain written consent, and a staffing team member does not accompany the individual to assure the parents were informed of their rights, the staffing process, the annual reviews, or the objections to special education placement by many ethnic communities. The practice of sending the permission forms home with a child is not recommended.

Use of Native Language

Will test batteries be administered in the native language? This is suggested when (Delgado, 1982):

1. The student is a new arrival from a foreign country and attended public schools regularly.
2. The student is a new arrival and attended private schools regularly.
3. Foreign public schools or private schools were attended by the student in the recent past (less than a year.)

It is not recommended when:

1. The parents were educated in a foreign country and the child is born in the United States.
2. The child is foreign born but had no schooling there.
3. The child speaks English.

What is the reliability and validity of these tests and with what population were they normed?

Use of United States Norm in English

On test batteries used with American children, students with English as a second language typically score two standard deviations below the norm (Delgado, 1982 and Cummins, 1985). Of course, many children will score higher and many will score lower. We know that Japanese and Cuban children tend to test higher. This is when only the native language is spoken by the child.

When the child speaks both English and the native language, the score typically will average one standard deviation below the norm. When the child speaks only English (particularly Hispanic children), there is one-half a standard deviation difference between these children's scores and Anglo-American children's scores.

Some batteries, such as the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, will yield a range higher than two standard deviations below the norm (Sattler, 1982). While the range on others, such as the Woodcock-Psycho Educational Battery, is unknown for children for whom English is a second language.

Controlling for Over Identification

Since low academic achievement is typical in the first five years of school for these children (Cummins, 1985), we run the constant risk of over identifying children from this group as handicapped. We may fail to recognize:

1. Children for whom academic difficulty is a result of lacking English skills only. These children may score so low they may appear to have Significant Limited Intellectual Capacity (mentally deficient).
2. The group of children with a handicapping condition but for whom the lack of academic progress is due to lacking language skills in English and not the handicapping condition. Because of the large discrepancy between ability and academic performance, we assume it is due to the handicapping condition.

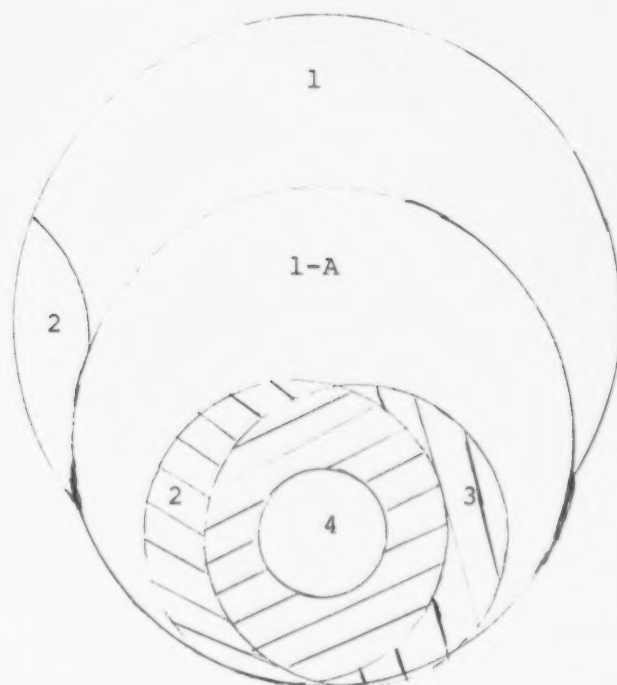
There are unknown conditions such as student testing behavior, tester bias, classroom teacher bias, or medical problems that may effect false positive identification of these students as handicapped. The interaction effect of a second language and these variables has at times resulted with as high as 300% false identification of ethnic and linguistic minority group members. Two possible safeguards are recommended:

1. School districts should keep records of the ethnic and linguistic groups with significant numbers living in the school enrollment area that are placed in special education by category. This will allow the district to evaluate if higher than normally expected percentages of students from any one group have been placed in special education classes.

2. During the annual review process, special education teachers need to be alert to progress by students who receive native language instruction and accelerate their performance. These students were incorrectly identified as handicapped.

The following diagram illustrates the interaction of a second language with a handicapping condition.

Children for Whom English is Second Language



1. No academic problems
2. With a handicapping condition
3. Other factors account for academic difficulty
4. Special education population

What are the interaction effects of #1-A, #2, and #3?

We need to remove the effects of a second language in order to assess #4.

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BOULDER VALLEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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QUESTIONS FOR INFORMAL ASSESSMENT

Classroom---> Building Conference--> Staffing--> Reviews--> Placement

LANGUAGE:

- level of schooling (parents and students)?
- length of stay in USA?
- geographic location & dialects?
- child rearing patterns?
- socio-economic status?
- rural?
- more than one language?
- code switching? ...

CULTURE:

- migrant?
- refugee?
- family practices?
- taboos?
- resistance to assimilation? ...

PARENT:

- informed in native language?
- consultation sought?
- translation appropriate?
- clear explanation of rights?
- clear explanation of potential outcomes of process?
- extended family utilized?
- forms translated? ...

ENVIRONMENT:

- adaptive behavior?
- behavior with peers?
- home discipline?
- nutrition?
- role models?
- neighborhood? ...

PREVIOUS INTERVENTIONS:

- cultural?
- linguistic?
- use of resources?
- performance? ...

HISTORY TAKING:

- native language or use of translator?
- translator training? ...

REFERRAL RATE:

- low or high?
- classroom vs. building?
- population and categorical analysis?
- national vs. local norms? ...

TEACHER VARIABLES:

- methods?
- training?
- values?
- experience?
- bilingual? ...

LEARNING STYLES:

- time on task?
- sequential or simultaneous?
- group or individual?
- experiences?
- resources? ...

MOTIVATION:

- self-concept?
- emotional factors?
- success?
- financial stress? ...

STUDENT STRENGTHS:

- rate of growth?
- gifted or talented? ...

ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS:

- normed for minorities?
- cultural load?
- appropriate for referral question?
- language?
- proper training of translators? (avoid the use of young translators for adult clients)
- training of evaluator?
- informal assessment? ...

AVAILABLE RESOURCES:

- resource space available?
- bilingual staffing?
- services by categories? ...